

VZCZCXYZ0003
RR RUEHWEB

DE RUEHNK #0024/01 0091531
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
R 091531Z JAN 09
FM AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 8007
INFO RUCNMGH/MAGHREB COLLECTIVE
RUEHBP/AMEMBASSY BAMAKO 0287
RUEHMD/AMEMBASSY MADRID 1943
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 0846
RHMFISS/COMSOCEUR VAHINGEN GE
RHMFISS/HQ USAFRICOM STUTTGART GE

C O N F I D E N T I A L NOUAKCHOTT 000024

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/09/2013
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [SNAR](#) [WI](#) [AG](#)
SUBJECT: POLISARIO DISSIDENT VISITS

REF: 2007 NOUAKCHOTT 986

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Dennis Hankins for reasons
1.4 (b and d)

11. (C) Summary: Sahrawi dissident Mahjoub Saleck of the Khat al-Shahid faction of POLISARIO saw a significant decrease in nationalist fervor among young Sahrawi in his first authorized visit to POLISARIO controlled areas of Western Sahara since 2006. Saleck saw a disturbing focus instead on making money -- legitimately or illegitimately -- which he sees as posing a risk of increased contraband smuggling, drug trafficking and, potentially, support for terrorism. While Saleck sees no possibility of a linkage between POLISARIO and AQIM, he sees regular deconflicting of activities between the POLISARIO, AQIM and Tuareg involved in drug trafficking. Saleck says POLISARIO is concerned about the perceived affinity of Mauritania's General Aziz to Morocco but believes their business connections with the Mauritanian military in smuggling activities will protect them. End Summary

12. (C) Saleck visits: Khat al-Shahid President Mahjoub Saleck called on Charge January 8 following a two week visit to POLISARIO controlled areas of Western Sahara. Spanish-based Saleck, who last visited the Embassy in 2007 (REFTEL), said he had been able to get authorization for his first visit in two years because of a December Human Rights Watch report that had chastised the POLISARIO for suppressing dissident Sahrawi voices who advocated settlement options other than independence. As in his previous visit, Saleck angled for funding for his organizations information activities in the camps and thoroughly condemned the POLISARIO leadership under Muhammed Abdelaziz as corrupt and more interested in the profitable status quo than the welfare of the Sahrawi people. Saleck saw everyone looking to the new U.S. administration for the future of talks. He said Morocco would accept Ambassador Ross as SRSG but had "played tough for five months to show they could bring down an SRSG as easily as the Algerians." He suggested the Moroccans would have preferred a "third-world" SRSG "because they can be bought off." Comment: Post has seen web references suggesting that Saleck was expelled from his presidency of Khat al-Shahid in December 2008 following an interview in which he advocated autonomy negotiations. Saleck presented himself as though he is still the dissident movement's head. End Comment

13. (C) All About Money Now: Saleck told Charge he had seen a significant change in the orientation of his Sahrawi contacts noting, "nobody is talking politics anymore -- everything is about how to make money (legally or illegally), how to get a passport, and how to get a visa." Saleck noted that 75% of the Sahrawi are under 35 and had been born in the camps. He claimed most were politically disillusioned seeing POLISARIO President Abdelaziz profiting

handsomely from the status quo. He noted significant increase in wealth noting some of his contacts had gone "from owning 20 goats two years ago to five Toyotas now" with most of the wealth coming from contraband sale of UN relief supplies and, more importantly, the growing drug trade. He worried that the newer generation of politically disaffected Sahrawi youth were increasingly drawn to these illicit activities and were making themselves available for hire to anyone -- including Al Qaeda.

¶4. (C) An Illicit Crossroads: Saleck saw illegal activity throughout his trip starting at the main bordering Mauritanian town of Zoerate where POLISARIO openly sells U.N. assistance. He noted that the Mauritanian's actively support this because the goods are cheap -- smuggled fuel, for instance, being half the cost of fuel elsewhere in Mauritania. Saleck crossed over into Western Sahara near the extreme northeastern Mauritanian border town of Bir Mogrein which he saw as a crossroads of illicit activity. Aside from POLISARIO contraband activities, SALECK claimed there are active drug smuggling convoys (often escorted by Tuareg serving as security), Pakistani alien smugglers, and the regular presence of Al Qaeda. Saleck emphasized he did not see any direct cooperation between Al Qaeda and POLISARIO noting that AQIM/GSPC was an enemy of the government in Algiers -- the same Algiers government that is the principle benefactor and protector of the POLISARIO. He did believe that POLISARIO coordinates with both AQIM and the Tuareg to deconflict their activities (with the POLISARIO getting a commission on the Tuareg drug activities). He did believe that individual Sahrawi are being recruited by AQIM and noted that, compared to past years, he saw many more Sahrawi "long-beards" who had trained in Algeria preaching a radical form of Islam.

¶5. (C) Concern About Mauritania: Noting that most Sahrawi have a closer personal and ethnic affinity to Mauritania than Algeria, Saleck noted that the POLISARIO was concerned about the August 6 could led by General Aziz who is seen as having close ties to Rabat. He added that there had nearly always been a senior Mauritanian military or government figure of Sahrawi stock and that none are included in Aziz' government.

He alleged that the POLISARIO is still reasonably comfortable because they maintain business dealings with senior Mauritanian military in the contraband and narcotics realms.

HANKINS